

THE

WHAT THE LEFT DOESN'T GET ABOUT ERIC ADAMS — P6

INDYPENDENT

#269: MARCH 2022



IS IT OK TO LAUGH?

AS THE PANDEMIC ENTERS ITS THIRD YEAR, WE CHOP IT UP
WITH POLITICAL COMIC FRANCESCA FIORENTINI

BY JOHN TARLETON — P10

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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ILLUSTRATION DIRECTOR

Frank Reynoso

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Mikael Tarkela

DESIGNERS

Leia Doran, Anna Gold,
Evan Sult

GENERAL INQUIRIES:

contact@indypendent.org

SUBMISSIONS & NEWS TIPS:

submissions@indypendent.org

ADVERTISING & PROMOTION:

ads@indypendent.org

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTORS

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J. Bader, Bennett Baumer,
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BOOKS & COMMUNITY: SISTER'S UPTOWN BOOKSTORE & CULTURAL CENTER
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1942 AMSTERDAM AVE, MANHATTAN

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FILM: SUMMER OF SOUL (...OR, WHEN THE REVOLUTION COULD NOT BE TELEVISED)

A 2021 American documentary film directed by Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson about the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival that lasted for six weeks. Despite having a large attendance and performers such as Stevie Wonder, Mahalia Jackson, Nina Simone, The 5th Dimension, The Staple Singers, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Blinky Williams, Sly and the Family Stone and the Chambers Brothers, the festival was overlooked in pop culture, something that the documentarians investigate.
Watch with a Hulu subscription or rent on Vudu.

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SUGGESTED \$16

FEMINIST ART: ELIZABETH A. SAKLER
CENTER AT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM
The Elizabeth A. Sakler Center for Feminist Art is an exhibition and education environment dedicated to feminist art—its past, present and future. Among the most ambitious, influential, and enduring artistic movements to emerge in the late 20th century, feminist art has played a leading

role in the art world over the last 40 years.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 EASTERN PKWY,
BROOKLYN

FRI FEB 18 & TUE FEB 22

FREE • 7:30PM

FILM: BLACK HISTORY MONTH FILM SERIES

In celebration of Black History Month, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-NYC and Maysles Cinema present two critically acclaimed documentaries exploring the impact of the Black Radical Tradition in the US and globally: *Audre Lorde: The Berlin Years 1984 to 1992* (79 Minutes; Germany; Dir. Dagmar Schultz; Feb. 18) and *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography in Four Voices* (76 Minutes; USA; Dir. Louis Masliah; Feb. 23)
MAYSLES CINEMA
343 Malcolm X Blvd (Between 127th & 128th Streets), Harlem

SAT FEB 19

FREE • 2PM

VIRTUAL PROGRAM: BLACK WOMEN AND THEORIES OF THE FUTURE

A virtual conversation detailing and discussing Black women's cultural and academic contributions to Afrofuturism past, present, and future. The program features Dr. Susana Morris, Dr. Kinitra Brooks, Dr. Esther Jones, Dr. Tiffany Barber, and Dr. Grace Gipson. It is a part of The Schomburg Center's Black Feminist Futures Series.

REGISTER VIA on.nypl.org/3oxWqze

SAT FEB 12, SUN FEB 20 & THU FEB 24

\$15 • 7PM

MUSIC: BLACK HISTORY TRILOGY
In celebration of Black History Month, Flushing Town Hall presents a Black History Trilogy, a three-part series featuring outstanding performers showcasing the musical tribute to Jimi Hendrix (SAT, FEB 12), remembering Bert Williams in song

(SUN, FEB 20), and the music of the Black Church (THU, FEB 24).

FLUSHING TOWN HALL
THEATER

137-35 Northern Blvd,
Queens

www.flushingtownhall.org/third-stone-from-the-sun

THU FEB 17

FREE • 5:30PM

JAZZ: PHIL YOUNG EXPERIENCE

Join NYC Parks in partnership with the Jazz Foundation of America for a celebration of Black History Month with Phil Young. A much-loved figure in the Uptown community, Phil Young has played with legendary figures like Bobby "Blue" Bland, Jimi Hendrix, George Benson, Art Farmer and Dizzy Gillespie. This special event features the full lineup of his "Experience" band, with special guests.
HANSBOROUGH RECREATION CENTER
35 W 134 St, Manhattan
www.nycgovparks.org/events/2022/02/17/jazz-concert-phil-young-experience

WED FEB 23

\$20 • 6PM

CHAMBER MUSIC: HARLEM CHAMBER PLAYERS

The Harlem Chamber Players are presenting the 14th annual Black History Month celebration on February 23 at 6 p.m at the Harlem School of the Arts. The program features performances of three pieces written by famous Black composers: Ennanga by William Grant Still, We Met at the Symphony by Nkeiru Okoye, and Through This Vale of Tears by David Baker. Tickets are \$20 for general admission and \$15 for students and seniors.
HARLEM SCHOOL OF THE ARTS
645 Nicholas Ave, Manhattan
www.harlemchamberplayers.org/event/14th-annual-black-history-month-celebration

BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Nina Simone at the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival. The legendary music festival was the subject of a 2021 documentary film by Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson.

FEB 25–JUNE 25

FREE

EXHIBIT: BLACK DOLLS

Black Dolls explores handmade cloth dolls made primarily by African-American women from 1850-1940 through the lens of race, gender, and history. It features more than 100 cloth dolls, alongside dozens of historical photographs of white and Black children posed with their playthings and caregivers.

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FIND EVENTS AT www.nypl.org/events/womenshistorymonth

MARCH

FREE

WOMEN'S HISTORY: NYC PARKS

Take a look at the many park properties and monuments honoring women, both local and worldwide figures, both historical and in our recent past, and learn more about the women who shaped our park system. Explore New York City parks named for women, art in the parks by women, and park spaces that feature monuments that honor women's history.
SEE ALL EVENTS AT www.nycgovparks.org/about/history/women

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JOHN TARLETON

BRIEFING ROOM

ADAMS OKS SWITCHING RETIREES TO MEDICARE ADVANTAGE

Mayor Eric Adams announced Feb. 6 that he would go ahead with the de Blasio administration's plan to switch the healthcare of almost 250,000 retired city workers from traditional Medicare to a private Medicare Advantage plan. The deal, which municipal workers' unions agreed to last year, is projected to save the city \$600 million a year. Retiree groups have filed a lawsuit that has delayed the change. It argues that the private plan will reduce their healthcare through co-payments, bureaucratic delays, and providers not accepting it, and that the city doesn't have the right to cut benefits for people already retired. "There should have been other ways to cut costs than to throw old and frail and sick retirees under the bus," Sarah Shapiro, a retired United Federation of Teachers member and a Cross-Union Retirees Organizing Committee activist, told *LaborPress*.

NY DEMS DO THEIR OWN CONGRESSIONAL GERRYMANDER

With Republican state legislators in Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina "packing and cracking" congressional districts to slash the number of Democratic (and Black-majority) House seats, New York Democrats have countered with their own gerrymander. Their redistricting map, signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul on Feb. 3, would likely cut the Republican share of the state's 26 seats from eight to four. Republican Nicole Malliotakis, the only House member from New York City to vote to nullify the 2020 election results, would see her Staten Island-Bay Ridge district extended to include liberal Park Slope. Fellow Trump acolyte Lee Zeldin's district on eastern Long Island would have several largely Latino and black towns added and white-majority areas excised. Democratic-held districts would also be contorted, with leftist Rep. Jamaal Bowman's Bronx-Westchester district corkscrewing north as far as Putnam County. Republicans are challenging the map in federal court.

CITY COUNCIL REDISTRICTING BEGINS

Meanwhile, the process of redistricting New York City Council seats began Feb. 7, with the council naming eight mem-

bers — five Democrats and three Republicans — to a 15-member commission. Mayor Eric Adams will pick the other seven. The city's redistricting process has much tighter rules than the state's: Districts must be compact and not break up neighborhoods, and there are strict limits on when they can cross borough lines. All councilmembers will have to run in the new districts in 2023, with four-year terms resuming in 2025 and 2029.

FIRST WORLD PROBLEMS

A wealthy real-estate owner and his wife are suing a Brooklyn hotel for \$5 million after the reception for their daughter's wedding last September was suddenly moved from a large hall to a small party space due to noise restrictions. Russell and Marjorie Newman charged that the hotel had not informed them about the rules, and thus caused "infliction of emotional distress." Their lawyer told the *New York Post* it was "corporate greed at its worst." The Newmans had spent more than \$150,000 just on flowers for the nuptials.

CUNY STAFF DEMANDS 'NEW DEAL'

CUNY adjunct professors traveled to Westchester County Feb. 5 to protest outside City University of New York Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez's home in Pelham. "We know that the eroding state of racist austerity at CUNY demands such 'nuclear' actions," the Rank and File Action group posted on Twitter. The Professional Staff Congress, the union representing 30,000 faculty and professional staff, is calling for a "CUNY New Deal," a five-year plan sponsored by Sen. Andrew Gounardes (D-Brooklyn) and Assemblymember Karines Reyes (D-Bronx) that would increase funding by \$250 million a year; hire more than 1,400 new full-time faculty and counselors; and eliminate tuition for undergraduates.

CHEEKY HUMOR: City retirees rallied outside City Hall in September to protest a plan to shift their healthcare coverage to the privately run Medicare Advantage.

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Tenants from Brooklyn to the Bronx are fighting to ensure landlords follow laws guaranteeing heat and hot water during winter months.

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Nicholas Powers looks at how Eric Adams forged a deep bond with working-class Black New Yorkers and what he might use his power for.

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Oil terminal workers in North Brooklyn have been on strike against their billionaire boss for over nine months. And they aren't giving up.

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The worker-led Amazon Labor Union is flexing its power ahead of a union recognition vote by 6,000 employees at a Staten Island Amazon warehouse.

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Most Americans couldn't find Ukraine on a map. But the Biden administration could stumble into a war there against a nuclear-armed adversary.

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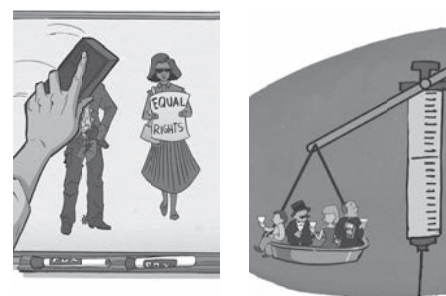
Anthropologist David Graeber's final book is an epic, ambitious romp through the past 30,000 years of social evolution.

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What we can learn from Chip Berlet, who spent the past 40 years tracking the growth of far-right movements.

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The good reverend revisits past efforts to unionize Starbucks and how the company co-opted the revolutionary flavor of coffeehouse culture.





STEVEN WISHNIA

FEEL THE HEAT

FROM BROOKLYN TO THE BRONX, TENANTS PUSH DEMANDS FOR WINTER HEAT AND HOT WATER

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The fire that killed 17 people in a Bronx subsidized-housing complex Jan. 9 was started by an electric space heater — something thousands of New Yorkers use when their landlord isn't giving them enough heat.

"We know that building wasn't heated properly because of the number of space heaters," says Beverly Newsome, president of the tenant organization at the Ebbets Field Apartments, a seven-building complex in Crown Heights that has more than 1,300 apartments.

The heat was especially bad in January, "when it was 11° or 12° outside," she says, and the landlord has a pattern of turning the heat up in the morning and evening and down during the day and later at night.

"This is a habit," Newsome says. "It is a practice."

At 367 East 163rd St. in the Bronx, Monica Acosta is living with a similar pattern.

"We get very inadequate heat. It only lasts five to ten minutes," she says. "This has been going on for a while."

She has a space heater, and other people in the building leave their ovens on to stay warm. "It's dangerous, but they aren't giving us what we need," she says. "If it's like 20 degrees outside, you have to find a way to keep warm enough. You know the risks. You don't want your family to get sick."

Acosta has asthma, and lives with her teenage daughter and foster children.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Under New York City law, building owners from Oct. 1 to May 31 must provide tenants with enough heat to keep the inside temperature at least 68°F from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. if it's below 55° outside. At night, the inside temperature must be at least 62°.

The city Department of Housing Preservation and Develop-

ment (HPD) is responsible for enforcing the law. Tenants can call 311 to complain if there's no heat or hot water in their apartment or building. When they do, HPD tries to notify the building's owner or manager, and may also try to contact tenants to see if the heat's back on. If it isn't, the agency will send an inspector.

Lack of heat or hot water is an "immediately hazardous" Class C violation, which must be corrected "immediately." If the landlord doesn't, HPD can issue fines of \$250 to \$500 a day for the season's first offense, and \$500 to \$1,000 a day for a second offense. It can also hire a private contractor through its Emergency Repair Program to fix the boiler or deliver fuel, billing the costs to the landlord.

Last winter, HPD received more than 114,000 separate complaints about lack of heat or hot water that resulted in 3,855 inadequate-heat violations, both numbers slightly up from four years before. Its inspectors tried to check out complaints 112,650 times, and also issued 5,454 violations for lack of hot water. The agency charged landlords \$1.3 million for heat-related emergency repairs and collected about \$850,000 in civil penalties, significantly less than in 2016-17.

HPD did not provide figures for this year's heating season.

According to HPD complaints listed online, tenants at the Ebbets Field Apartments reported no heat in their entire building on six days between Jan. 1-25, and on nine other days in individual apartments — complaints that often indicate building-wide problems. In the 59-apartment group of buildings that 367 East 163rd St. is part of, there had been complaints about no heat in the entire building on five days since Oct. 1, and in individual apartments on six more.

The boiler there was replaced after a fire two years ago, but lack of heat is still a problem, Acosta says — and tenants were assessed a major-capital-improvement rent increase to pay for the new boiler, about \$30-35 a month for her two-bedroom apartment. That led her and others to organize a tenant association, working with Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) and the Legal Aid Society.

Both groups of buildings have numerous other problems. Acosta says she has one room full of mold, and it's been hard to get any repairs done. As of Jan. 29, HPD listed 87 open Class C violations from the past year, for mice, roaches, mold, a locked boiler room, loose stairs, lead-based paint in several apartments, and — most ominous after the Jan. 9 fire — two for self-closing doors, which prevent smoke from spreading outside the unit, not working. Only one, issued Jan. 24, was for lack of heat.

Ebbets Field Apartments had 82 open Class C violations, including roaches, mice, mold, water leaks, and five malfunctioning self-closing doors.

The complex has a long history of problems. Newsome told Tenant/Inquilino in 2018 that it was so poorly maintained that it was "often mistaken for a public-housing building," but it is "a privately owned, rent-stabilized complex whose tenants are

just being ignored."

Opened in 1962, it was built on the site of the demolished Brooklyn Dodgers stadium as part of the state's Mitchell-Lama program for privately owned, publicly subsidized affordable housing. The landlord, Shalom Drizin's Fieldbridge Associates, which has owned the building since 1980, was one of the earliest landlords to buy their way out of the program, which is allowed after 25 years.

It's now a mix of rent-stabilized and market-rate tenants, says Newsome, and with Crown Heights and nearby Prospect-Lefferts Gardens gentrifying, "the landlord has begun in the last 10 years to be very predatory... the law is set up to allow that."

The problem with HPD's enforcement, she says, is that "currently, the system is reactive." It generally depends on complaints from tenants, and the agency doesn't issue violations until an inspector visits the premises and confirms the lack of heat — and by that time, the tenant might be at work, or the heat might be back on. "In the wintertime, HPD is stretched really thin," she adds.

"There's enough information out there for HPD to be proactive," Newsome continues, but "there has to be legislation that gives them teeth."

In 2020, an audit by the state comptroller's office said HPD "has incorrectly identified hundreds — possibly thousands — of heat and hot water complaints as duplicates and failed to respond to those complaints." Residents of one Brooklyn building, it said, reported lack of heat 175 times from 2017 to 2019 without getting a single inspection, because they were all counted as part of the same complaint.

The audit found that it often took three days or more for an inspector to come, and that HPD does not notify tenants of roughly when they need to be home to let the inspector in.

Newsome is enthusiastic about heat sensors, which send temperature readings to a central computer. They are an objective device that can show patterns, she says, "able to relay the habit of how the heat is on."

On Jan. 28, Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-N.Y.), introduced a bill that would require the sensors in all federally subsidized rental housing. Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) have also endorsed it.

Acosta says the Bronx tenants whose space heater started the Jan. 9 fire were unfairly blamed, when the real problem was lack of heat.

"They always put it on the tenant," she says. "That's not right. They should give us what they're supposed to."

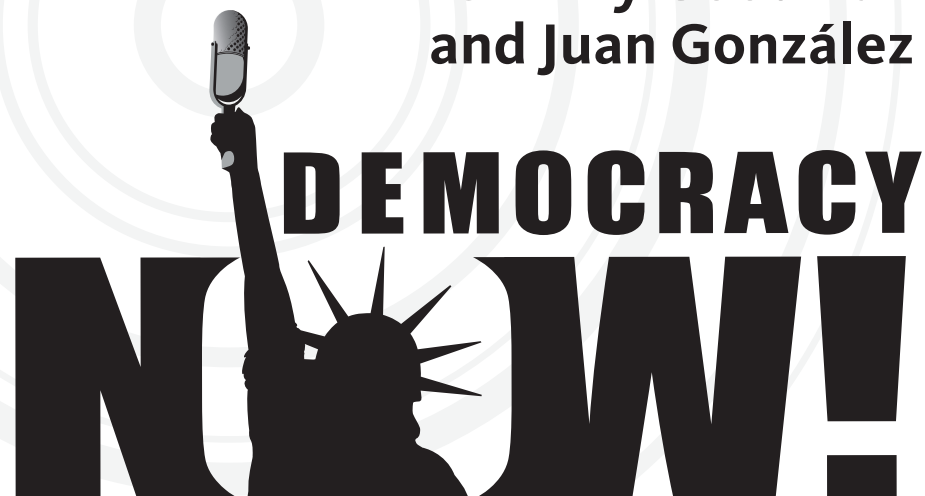
OUT AT HOME:

Tenants at the Ebbets Field apartment complex in Crown Heights protest poor maintenance in 2018 including lack of heat and hot water during the winter. Those problems persist to this day.

EARTH RIOT RADIO

REVEREND BILLY & SAVITRI D

A Daily Independent
Global News Hour
with Amy Goodman
and Juan González



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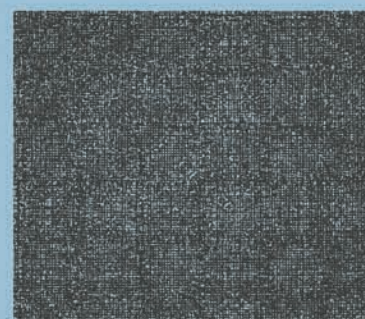
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ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

IS ERIC ADAMS PLAYING BLACK VOTERS?

NYC'S NEW MAYOR TAPPED INTO THE HIGHLY CHARGED DREAM OF A STRONG BLACK FATHER FIGURE WHO CAN SET THE HOUSE STRAIGHT. WILL HE END UP BETRAYING HIS WORKING CLASS SUPPORTERS?

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Do we have a mayor or a shell game artist? Check Mayor Eric Adams at the microphone during a press conference. He's two men in one. Sometimes, he's New York's proud son, guiding the city with chest out, dressed to kill. Peep him. He can be a shell game hustler, using a bodega coffee cup to hide the class warfare rich New York wages against us. He swirls it around until we lose track of the truth.

New York's first Black mayor since David Dinkins is on a honeymoon. Brother can do no wrong. He wooed us. He put a ring on it. He told us he'll protect us. But Adams is a conservative Democrat who won't call out the real cause of crime. Yes, it's guns. Yes, the city must track the violence. Mostly, it's wealth inequality, intergenerational trauma and the in-your-face fact that working-class New Yorkers serve the city but are treated like shit by the rich.

And he won because of all of New York's swagger, all the strut, all the cool that never reaches our radical activists. The left here, like the left everywhere, loves talking to the woke-ing class but not the working class. If it did, it'd learn what Adams did when he was coming of age in Southeast Queens. The Street has its own rules, its own language. The Street is brutal and beautiful too. If you want its love, you have to draw a heart in wet concrete. You have to love profanity more than purity. And some of us can't be saved but you got to give our babies a chance.

RUNNING GAME

Adams has game. He has more game than Monopoly. He knew what to say to us and how to say it. Be cool, he said. I got this. Felt good to hear it because we've been on edge for two years now. We got hit with COVID. We fell behind on rent. Our kids weren't in school. Protests rocked the city. Teens smashed store windows and stole. Gang members shot other gang members in open daylight. Asian people were being beaten up in public.

All of these anxieties fueled a fear that was larger than the danger. The media put every dramatic crime under a microscope and shot the image into our brains. Of course, we panicked. We shuddered at the memory of the Bad Old Days of the 70s and 80s — squeegee men hanging out at traffic lights would thump dirty rags on windshields and demand payment. Teen “wolf packs” would go “wilding.” Parks would be open drug markets. **BUT NONE OF THAT WAS HAPPENING!**

Crime — it became a container for displaced anxiety. Yes, there was a real uptick in murders from 319 in 2019 to 488 in 2021, but New York is still a far safer city than in 1990 when the murder toll was 2,254. We are not dealing with just a spike in crime, but a much greater spike in the perception of crime. Which is useful for the city's business class, eager to discipline us after the Black Lives Matters protests and bring back heavy-handed policing.

If this new image of crime is bourgeois fear mongering,

for some of us, it is terrifyingly real. Black and Latino neighborhoods are hardest hit by crime. Our neighborhoods have the most unsolved murders, especially in the Bronx and South Brooklyn. When Adams blasted fellow mayoral candidate Maya Wiley's plan to redirect \$1 billion from the NYPD, he said, “Black and brown babies are being shot in our streets, hate crimes are terrorizing Asian and Jewish communities and innocent New Yorkers are being stabbed and shot on their way to work,” it rang true. Poor people of color never really escaped the Bad Old Days. The Sex and City New York, the Friends and Seinfeld New York, the Girls New York was a city that out-of-town gentrifiers enjoyed, but for a lot of us, life was a constant Law & Order episode.

Quiet as it's kept, many Black and Latino folks are not feeling BLM. Yes, we marched. Yes, we shouted “I can't breathe” but we also swallowed the painful fact that we wanted police to protect us from each other. Man... it's hard to write that. How many times did I talk with neighbors torn between wanting to feel safe and wanting to feel loyal? When the cops put up a police surveillance tower, the auntie who ran a nearby restaurant told me, “Good. We need that.” The brother at the laundry was mugged by another Black man, who told him he only mugs Black people because the police don't care enough to follow up. “I was mugged by a racist criminal.” He threw up his hands.

When I first moved to Bed-Stuy, gunshots woke me from sleep. I saw my neighbors shot. One rolled back his pant leg and showed me the scab. A Black lesbian was left to die in a pool of blood after a drive-by. Things are better now. But a bullet leaves pain in the soul that never fully heals. Even now, I wince at loud noises.

A STRONG BLACK MAN

“We need strong Black men.” I heard that damn near my whole life. A lot of us didn't have one. The hunger for a father figure is deep and it gave rise to an archetype of the Strong Black Man. Adams banked on it. He showed up in NYPD jackets, boasted about his health and promised to put the bulletproof vest he once wore on each one of our children. One of the surest ways to succeed in politics is to tap into an underlying, highly charged dream.

Imagine Mayor Adams on public TV, singing George Michael's “I Will Be Your Father Figure,” wearing sunglasses and pointing at us. He is the Black sergeant in Ender's Game and An Officer and A Gentleman. He's Morpheus from *The Matrix*. He's Bill Cosby without the rape. He's Joe Louis Clark from *Lean on Me*. He's the living embodiment of an archetype we created to survive the absence of real fathers in our lives.

I voted for him. Neighbors voted for him. We voted for

Adams, son of the city, a shorty born in Brownsville, Brooklyn and as Fat Joe rapped, came “all the way up.” The force is strong with this one. The identification is real. He speaks like we do. One time he straight up said, “Yo. Yo. Yo,” to reporters — which is Street for “shut the fuck up.”

In the coming year that identification may get stronger as Adams steers the city through terror and rage if Republicans win the 2022 midterms and steal the 2024 presidential elections. How would he handle a second Trump administration crackdown on civil liberties? Will he direct the NYPD to protect us from white supremacist terrorists emboldened to bomb subways or synagogues or mosques? From those who come to town to shoot protesters? Or will he stand aside and let a police department full of Trump sympathizers act on its own dark impulses?

And this is why the left is being left behind. The activists and thinkers who should organize resistance to fascism, mobilize the working class to defend democracy and envision a “new” New York that honors workers can be petty as fuck. A recent low point was when AOC wagged her finger at Adams after he mangled a statement on getting office workers back so food truck vendors who rely on their business could again earn a buck. The optics of a fair-skinned, straight-haired Latina berating New York’s first Black mayor since Dinkins over a quote that working-class people understood perfectly fine was, well, just bad.

What the New York left’s obsession with identity misses is we aren’t just victims. We don’t want pity. We want power. The Street taught us that.

What maybe no one outside of the hood gets is that deep down, we want a Strong Black Man to come home and set things right. But the Street taught us that hustlers will front like your long-lost friend. We should’ve remembered that when we voted.

THE RACIAL SHELL GAME

We voted for the mayor we loved, New York’s son made good, but we got a shell game artist. When a horrific crisis or a crime shocks the city, instead of pointing to the real longstanding class inequality behind most of it, Adams puts out bodega cups with “race” or “victim blaming” or “law and order” written in Sharpie over it. And the shell game starts.

THE MAYOR PUTS OUT BODEGA CUPS WITH “RACE” OR “VICTIM BLAMING” OR “LAW AND ORDER” WRITTEN IN SHARPIE OVER IT. AND THE SHELL GAME STARTS.

When fire licked the windows of a building in the Bronx, killing 17 people inside, eight of whom were children, at the press conference, Adams told us to “close the door.” He didn’t mention the nearly 200 complaints and violations from lead paint to ... wait for it ... doors that did not self-close, which, under city code, is what they should do in order to stop fire and smoke from spreading. Or that Rick Gropper — the co-founder of Camber Property Group, which co-owns the building — donated to Adams’ campaign and was a housing advisor on his transition team. Shell game. That working-class immigrants in all five boroughs live in dangerous, dirty, cramped housing. Shell game.

Two cops, Jason Rivera and Wilbert Mora, were brutally gunned down in Harlem by Lashawn McNeil after his mother called for help. They were young cops. They were just trying to aid the situation. Afterwards, the mayor did what mayors should. He eulogized. He comforted a shook city. He then made quick moves to give a show of addressing crime like bringing back the plainclothes unit that targets guns and gangs but was also responsible for the killings of Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Eric Garner and many other innocent, unarmed men. He wanted to roll back bail reform so judges

can lock up a pre-trial defendant based on their “dangerousness.” Again, a shell game.

If our mayor, who was born in these streets, raised by these streets, truly wants a safe city, we need, as he himself says, “intervention” and “prevention.”

“We have a sea of violence in our city and country,” he said, “and there are many rivers feeding that sea. And we must dam each one.” In his Blueprint to End Gun Violence, he proposes expanding the Summer Youth Employment Program and more support for people suffering from mental illness, yet mostly focuses on surveillance and punishment. Again, a shell game.

The river of blood feeding the “sea of violence” begins way further upstream. It starts with poverty, which in New York is deep seeded and chronic. It starts with stressed moms, too poor to afford healthy food or health care. It starts with children crying from hunger. It starts with missing dads, locked up or dead. It starts with boys learning the Code of the Street that makes respect something worth killing over. It starts with intergenerational trauma passed down through slaps in the kitchen, beatings. It starts with mass incarceration that spews hardened men into the street. Add to it the endless flow of guns. A gun speaks louder than anything your mouth can say. A bullet is a scream traveling faster than the speed of sound.

To stop these rivers from feeding the “sea of violence,” we need, right now, a massive taxation of wealth to create new social programs. New housing. New trauma treatment centers. New jobs. A “new” New York. One that teaches its working-class youth to proof the city for climate change or build new subway lines that crisscross the outer boroughs. Big, bold projects by young people who realize New York is their inheritance. It belongs to them, not the rich.

Will our mayor do this? Will he stop playing games?

If he doesn’t, we will march with our children to City Hall and say, Brother man, time’s up, the Street has come for answers.

Nicholas Powers is a professor of literature at SUNY Old Westbury. He has written for The Independent, Truthout and The Village Voice. He is the author of Theater of War (Upset Press) and The Ground Below Zero (University of Arkansas Press).

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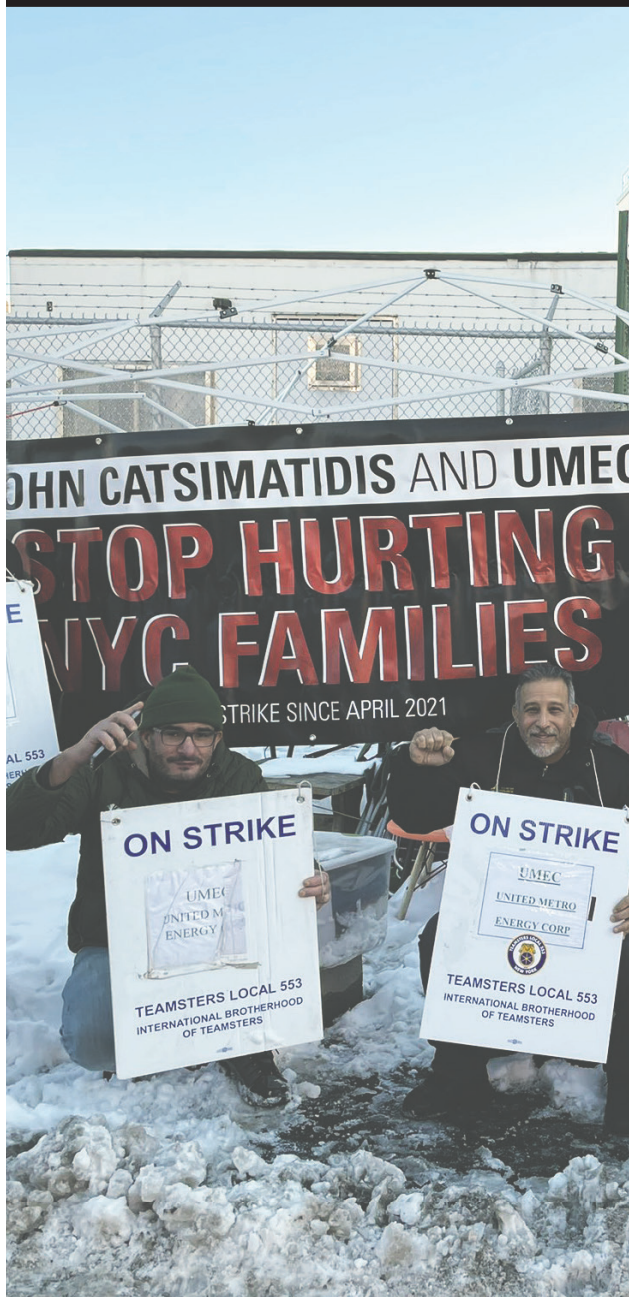
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AMBA GUERGUERIAN

OVER 9 MONTHS AND STILL ON STRIKE

PAY DISPARITY FUELS OIL TERMINAL WORKERS BATTLE WITH BILLIONAIRE BOSS

By AMBA GUERGUERIAN

On Newtown Creek in industrial North Brooklyn, the Buckeye Pipeline emerges from the ground into an access terminal — essentially a filling station — on the property of United Metro Energy Corporation (UMEC). The facility also receives fuel from barges that unload on their icy docks. UMEC delivers millions of gallons per day in petroleum products that fuel hospitals, schools, residential apartment buildings, the MTA and more. These fuels, carcinogenic and highly flammable, have to be handled carefully before they are dispersed around the city. A mistake on the job could result not only in personal injury, but in an explosion or major contamination of the surrounding waterways.

The 21 highly-trained men who used to do this dangerous work now find themselves out in the cold on the other side of the chain-link fence that marks the private property of UMEC.

They are in the 10th month of a strike that has no clear end in sight. Billionaire owner John Catsimatidis has hired less-experienced scabs whom he pays \$5 more an hour rather than agree to their union's demand for parity pay with what other oil terminal operators and mechanics earn in the New York City region, the main prerogative for the strike. They are paid \$27 an hour, 10 dollars less than the industry average.

On Feb. 1, the first Tuesday after a snowstorm, five striking workers and a couple of supporters stood under a sign that read: "John Catsimatidis and UMEC: Stop Hurting NYC Families." The wind blowing off the creek made the already frigid temperatures unbearable. Most of the men had to take respites in idling cars. "Every day, someone is here on the line showing that there's a presence here, seven days a week from seven in the morning to five in the evening," Strike Captain Andre Solyn told the *Indy* from his spot on the line, eyes on the oil terminal across the way.

"Well, it's hard enough," said Dennis Spence, a truck mechanic who's worked at the company for seven years. "Not much hope, but you have to keep going. You have to fight for what you want."

Three years ago, UMEC laborers decided to unionize with the Teamsters when the company started consolidating positions.

In negotiating the workers' first contract, Teamsters reps demanded the same protections their workers receive across the country: Parity pay, paid holidays off, night-differential pay, overtime pay, pensions and yearly raises.

After over two years of bitter negotiation, the workers went on strike, hoping to change Catsimatidis' mind. He said the union's demands would put him out of business.

The billionaire owns Gristedes Foods, a grocery chain in Manhattan; the Red Apple Group, a real estate and aviation company; and WABC-AM radio in New York City, which features rightwing show hosts such as Sean Hannity, Curtis Sliwa and Catsimatidis himself. The billionaire mogul held a Long Island fundraising party for Kathy Hochul in the Hamptons, says Demos Demopolous, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters 553 and the leading negotiator on the UMEC contract, who in an act of one-man protest stood in the driveway demanding Catsimatidis sign the union's proposed contract.

UMEC did not respond to a request for comment on strike negotiations.

Nearly all the striking workers are immigrants and all ex-

STILL HERE: Striking workers picket outside the United Metropolitan Energy Corporation oil terminal.

RELOADING: A tanker truck pulls into the UMEC terminal.

cept one are supporting multi-child families. Initially, each worker was eligible for six months of unemployment. Then they had to rely on a strike fund supported by Teamsters locals across the country. Strikers who have been able to pick up side jobs receive less from the fund.

"To this day we're still paying the strikers from the donations we collected," said Demopolous. The fund, though, is running low, and now the strikers are asking that supporters donate to a GoFundMe.

One ray of hope for the strikers lies in the fact that the workers' boycott is currently defined by the National Labor Relations Board as an economic strike, but if the board grants claims of Unfair Labor Practice (ULPs) filed by the Teamsters, the strike will become "a ULP strike, which occurs when workers are striking in response to an unfair labor practice. ... Think retaliatory firing of workers that are organizing or if the company is refusing to bargain in good faith," says NYC-based labor organizer Devon Gilliams. "Under an economic strike, the employer doesn't have to dismiss the scabs [when the strike is concluded] — they just have to wait until those positions 'open up.'" Which could be never, says Gilliams. But "in a ULP strike, workers have to be returned to their previous positions at the end of the strike. They have to dismiss the scabs."

Oil companies bid on contracts with the city. Catsimatidis often wins with low bids made possible by low wages, so the union also has an open claim with the City Comptroller's office, who ensures that bidding companies pay their employees prevailing wage rates, says the union.

As soon as all 21 UMEC workers went on strike last April, Catsimatidis began firing them, one by one, until eight were gone — all of whom still participate in strike activities. Solyn, strike captain and rabble rouser, was the first to be fired.

The scabs that keep the oil moving in and out of UMEC are not certified to work the lot and its docks, say the strikers. The year-long certification process, which all striking workers have undergone, is required by the city, they say. "They're not qualified to do this job," says Solyn. "This is downright dangerous," says Solyn. "You could have a big environmental impact there," he said, referring to an oil leak. When Solyn was hired, he had to learn the piping systems, valves and mechanics specific to UMEC's terminal.

Other unions, such as the UPS workers with Teamsters Local 804, the United Federation of Teachers, the Amazon Labor Union, 1199 SEIU, and the Student Workers of Columbia (SWC), have shown solidarity on the picket line. The Democratic Socialists of America have also aided the strikers' efforts. They made a list of clients serviced by UMEC, which indicated that 44% of the corporation's revenue comes from residential buildings and households and its most lucrative customer is Flushing Hospital, followed by two gas stations — a Sunoco at 1188 Metropolitan Ave. and a Gulf at 53-26 Van Dam St.

Those active in the labor movement know that right now, solidarity is more important than ever. "This is a bigger fight than us," says Solyn, who is encouraged to be a part of an upswing in the U.S. labor movement. "Wages have been stagnant for a long time ... It's worth it to pursue a fight where labor and capital can coexist. Now the relationship is totally one-sided in that the labor is being taken advantage of. We need representation."

Readers interested in supporting the strike can go to 500 Kingsland Ave. on Tuesdays from 9-10 a.m. to participate in weekly picket rallies. For more info, including the strike GoFundMe, visit New York Teamsters on Facebook, @TeamstersJC16 on Twitter or @nyteamsters Instagram.



AMBA GUERGUERIAN

AMAZON UNION ELECTION SET ON S.I.

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN

On Jan. 26, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) certified that organizers with the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) — a group of Amazon employees leading the struggle to unionize the company's Staten Island warehouses — had gathered enough signatures to force a union election at JFK8, the largest of the four warehouses.

This marks only the second time, following an effort in Bessemer, Alabama, that Amazon workers have forced a union election against their notoriously anti-union employer.

Then, on Feb. 2, the ALU filed a second petition to authorize a union vote. Organizers hope that the estimated

1,500 workers at the LDJ5 warehouse will soon join the roughly 6,000 JFK8 workers in having the chance to vote for union representation.

Amazon is proposing a March election for JFK8, while the worker-organizers want the vote to be delayed until the NLRB rules on an unfair labor practices claim against Amazon that could make it easier for them to communicate with workers inside the facility in advance of a vote. Among the charges against Amazon are forcing workers to attend anti-union "captive audience meetings" disguised as required trainings and on Nov. 15 calling the NYPD on ALU President Chris Smalls and fellow organizer Brett Daniels, who were campaigning at the bus stop on Amazon's premises.

The union has previously sought to organize from the parking lot outside the warehouses, but it is now taking a different approach.

"We've switched up our strategy," Smalls told *The Independent*. "We're

playing the inside game. We're occupying the break rooms and have domains in the cafeterias. We are disrupting the captive audience meetings that started back up this week. We are being more militant, a lot more aggressive on the front line; showing the workers that we have collective power."

On Feb. 4, the NLRB mailed ballots to Bessemer workers in a "rerun election," through March 25. In late November, the board announced a revote due to Amazon's egregious anti-union tactics in last year's election.

Meanwhile, Smalls says he's in touch with 18 other Amazon facilities that are looking to emulate ALU's worker-led unionization model at their warehouses. He hopes that if JFK8 wins its election, a domino effect will sweep the country, as is currently underway at Starbucks.

Follow the ALU at amazonlaborunion.org or on Twitter @amazonlabor.



AMBA GUERGUERIAN

ORGANIZERS: Brett Daniels, Chris Smalls and Josiah Morgan of the Amazon Labor Union outside Amazon's Staten Island warehouse complex.



SB WORKERS UNITED/TWITTER

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

STARBUCKS UNION CUP FILLS UP FAST

Labor organizing at Starbucks has mushroomed since workers at two of the chain's stores in Buffalo, N.Y., voted for the Starbucks Workers United union in early January. As we go to press, Starbucks workers in at least 72 stores in 21 states have filed for union recognition. "Every workplace in America should be democratized, and it's within our power to make that happen," said Sam LaGow, a worker at its Reserve Roastery in Manhattan. The union's Memphis chapter says it was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy "to carry on Memphis workers' tradition of fighting union-busting and seeking social justice." Meanwhile, Starbucks has retained a top union-busting law firm, Littler Mendelson, to stall union votes by filing multiple challenges to single-store elections with the National Labor Relations Board. On Feb. 8, the company fired all seven members of the organizing committee in Memphis.

REI WORKERS SEEK UNION

More than 100 workers at the REI outdoor-goods shop in Manhattan have filed to be represented by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. "We cannot continue to allow our job security, safety and well-being to be at stake," worker Graham Gale told *LaborPress*, citing "unsafe working conditions during a global pandemic." It would be the first union at the 168-store co-op chain, which bills itself as a progressive business: On Feb. 3, CEO Eric Artz opened a podcast to workers by saying he used he/him pronouns and was "speaking to you today from the traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples." Artz then argued that a union would be wrong for REI because it would "impact our ability to communicate and work directly with our employees."

SOMETHING'S BREWING: Workers in Buffalo celebrated when their Starbucks store became the first one in the nation to vote to unionize.

NLRB EYES NARROWING EMPLOYERS' GROUNDS TO OPPOSE UNIONS

National Labor Relations Board general counsel Jennifer Abruzzo told *Labor Notes* Feb. 7 that she wants to revive the "Joy Silk" doctrine, an NLRB ruling in effect from 1949 to 1969 that held if a majority of workers sign union cards, the employer should recognize the union voluntarily unless it has "good-faith doubts" that majority is legitimate. If employers call for an election because "they want time to coerce and intimidate workers to not vote for the union," Abruzzo said, "the remedy would be you are forced to sit down and bargain with this union." A pending case involving the Teamsters Union contesting XPO Logistics' refusal to recognize a union of truck drivers at the Port of Los Angeles might be the vehicle to resurrect the doctrine.

MEXICAN AUTO WORKERS REJECT COMPANY UNION

Workers at a General Motors plant in Silao, Mexico, voted overwhelmingly Feb. 1–2 to replace their employer-friendly union with the independent SINTTIA (National Auto Workers) union. The previous union was affiliated with the Congress of Mexican Labor (CTM), long tied to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which governed Mexico as a one-party state for most of the 20th century. CTM affiliates have been criticized for signing employer-friendly "protection contracts," without workers consenting to or even knowing about the deal, but a 2019 labor law requires workers to vote on whether to retain all current labor contracts by 2023.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR

If there's anything that Jeff Bezos makes faster than money, it's enemies. The Amazon founder and world's second richest man (net worth \$183 billion) faces not only an increasingly restless workforce, but the ire of the residents of Rotterdam, the major port city in the Netherlands.

Bezos's newly built \$500 million super yacht is stuck in port because it's too tall to pass under Rotterdam's iconic Koningshaven Bridge. When word leaked that Rotterdam's city government was going to disassemble the center section of the bridge to clear a path for the 417-foot-long Bezos boat, the backlash was quick. More than 3,500 people signed up on a Facebook event page to participate in egging the ship when it departs. "Rotterdam was built from rubble by the people of Rotterdam, and we don't just take that apart for the phallus symbol of a megalomaniac billionaire," the description of the event reads, according to Google translate. "Not without a fight!"

Rotterdam Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb now insists that a decision has not been made.

— INDEPENDENT STAFF

IS IT OK TO LAUGH?

By John Tarleton

Every weekday at 6 p.m., CNN viewers can tune into *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer*, the self-described “command center for breaking news, politics and extraordinary reports from around the world.”

Somewhere in a distant news galaxy far from the centers of power, *The Bitchuation Room* podcast rounds up political comics, activists and thinkers every Sunday evening on YouTube and Twitch for conversations at once irreverent and far more illuminating than anything on cable news. Presiding over this mashup is Francesca Fiorentini. The show is the latest endeavor of the former New York City-based anti-war activist turned constantly-hustling political comedian and commentator. She also appears on *The Damage Report* on The Young Turks Network and is the host and lead writer of AJ+’s *Newsbroke*, which airs short, entertaining videos that use a light-hearted touch to unpack complex topics such as white fragility in the workplace and the history of socialism in America. Think John Oliver but with more explicitly anti-capitalist politics.

With the pandemic entering its third year in a country exhausted by a dysfunctional political system, endless culture wars and looming climate change, laughter is in short supply. So, how can we regain a healthy sense of humor to help see us through this mess? I checked in with Fiorentini to get some answers.

In a wide-ranging conversation, we discussed, among other things, her journey from some of the more hidebound corners of the left to a career in comedy, how to step into the absurdity of our times and what progressives can learn from Donald Trump, the stand-up performer.

THE INDYPENDENT: Tell us about your evolution from the mid-2000s when you were a young antiwar activist and an editor at Left Turn Magazine to the present day? It seems like an unlikely beginning to a career in comedy.

FRANCESCA FIORENTINI: The left has been very self-isolating for a long time, and can be insular on purpose. I think it is so necessary to make our movements and our politics attractive and fun to be around — and enticing. Through my work in independent media and left media spaces, it became clear to me that there have to be content creators who are leftists, who are bringing our message to a wider audience in a way that is accessible. Because so much of left politics is inaccessible.

Coming up as a young activist, it was a badge of honor on the left to be esoteric and know all the different Trotskyist splits or other obscure points like that. It showed you were down for the cause. But that doesn’t attract anybody. For me, I decided I’m on the propaganda team when it comes to being for broader social change, for democratic socialism, the revolution, whatever you want to call it. I’m good at it, and I have fun. On the left, we pride ourselves on working ourselves to the bone. And that’s not always good. However one chooses to engage in politics, let it be sustainable. Comedy has made it sustainable for me, and has made it enjoyable and hopefully attractive and interesting and compelling to others as they see my work.

So how did you go into comedy?

I lived abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for five years. I was writing about Latin American politics for various outlets. I was also doing weird YouTube videos in my apartment that were political comedy. In 2009, I did stand-up comedy for the first time. It was for a foreign, English-speaking crowd. So most of my jokes were about being an expat — like the time a Latin lover sweeps an unassuming gringa off her feet, or when a tourist gets robbed for the first time.

On the left we are often taught to suppress the creative side. So I had put that on the back burner. But then when I was living in another country, it was a perfect opportunity. And to be honest, it was a low-stakes place to try out being a comedian. Either you do well on stage or you eat shit and then retell.

So you moved to San Francisco in 2013 and continued to do stand-up comedy while also producing and hosting a show for Al Jazeera Plus. And then 2016 and Donald Trump happened.

I decided I really wanted to do a show that wasn’t just a snarky remark every once in a while, but one that was actually funny and written to have a punchline, but that also educated people. That’s how *Newsbroke* came about. Our biggest hit was a segment on white fragility in the workplace which is still so relevant. We also explored topics like socialism and why Americans are so afraid of it.

I used to write 2,500-word articles. With video, you really learn how to economize and, sadly, learn how to write for a distracted, severely online not just generation but culture — and that comes with good and bad.

What makes for good political comedy?

The best political comedy punches up, not down. Also, it doesn’t always hit you over the head and doesn’t assume that you’re on board. You still have to make an argument, whether it’s a setup in a joke before a punchline, or whether the argument is a comedic monologue. Nobody wants to hear a smug insider like Bill Maher. He’s become so self-satisfied it’s like he enjoys the smell of his own farts.

Trump spawned so many different comedy shows, which was really good but at the same time [it] became kind of safe making the same Trump jokes. Like regular journalists, a lot of comedy journalists don’t want to lose their access. So they’re afraid to ask hard or weird questions. I’ve had some big gets, and I always try to push them and make them feel a little uncomfortable.

Who are comedians who inspire you?

John Oliver has done an excellent job at breaking down otherwise boring concepts using jokes. He doesn’t really talk about capitalism. He’s working with HBO, and they rely on corporate money just as anyone else in corporate media. Michelle Wolf is an incredible stand-up comic. Her short-lived show on Netflix had some of the funniest, smartest segments and sketches that I’ve seen. I love Roy Wood Jr. He’s part of *The Daily Show*, but he’s got such a great political sensibility that is still funny and attractive.



Talk about the challenges of being a female comic.

Successful comics say it takes many years to find your voice. In my case, I’ve always had a really strong voice. The question is: how do I temper it? You can’t always lead with anger — though white men are generally afforded more leeway to be angry on stage, and they are the ones for whom the most prestigious roles in political comedy have traditionally been reserved. It’s a lot more difficult for people of color and especially women to go full throttle into political comedy, because they are immediately seen as unlikeable.

You want to be likable, right? Well, there’s a stigma if you are a woman who’s talking about politics or feminism or whatever. At the same time, a lot of women and people of color get pigeonholed into only talking about women’s issues, or only talking about people of color issues. That has its own sort of cynical, essentialist identity politics that I’m not a huge lover of, as someone who’s always had passion for talking about war and militarism and capitalism.

When I was growing up, comedy was associated with guys like Bob Hope, Johnny Carson, David Letterman, Rodney Dangerfield.

Which is coming back. There’s a backlash in comedy against the presence of more comedians of color and women, even though it’s still not an even playing field. It mirrors the backlash in politics where white men feel aggrieved, that the world is against them just being a dude. So they make fun of women and make fun of abortion rights, or just make fun of

“YOU HAVE TO ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL THE ANGER BEFORE YOU CAN STEP INTO THE ABSURDITY OF THE MOMENT.”

trans people. And that gives them a sense of power and belonging and identity. It’s straight-up white identity politics, and their audience loves it.

The avatar of this has to be Donald Trump himself. What do you make of Trump as a fellow stand-up performer, and the way he develops new material?

He’s always on tour. And as much as I hate to say it, he’s funny. His callousness is funny, because it’s so stupid. And so crass. One lesson we can learn from him is to say what’s on your mind. Let it all hang out instead of couching it. MAGA wants a white ethnostate. I want socialist democracy.

How do you find humor in these grim times?

You have to laugh not to cry. But first you have to allow yourself to feel the anger before you can step into the absurdity of the moment. In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis recently enacted a straight-up white fragility bill that says nothing taught in a public school or in a private business can cause discomfort among, let’s be real, white people. It’s like a parody of a satirical video I made five years ago about white fragility in the workplace. But it’s really happening.

Your thoughts on doing political comedy for broadcast versus actual live stand-up?

It’s so different. When I produce a video for *Newsbroke*, the goal is to lay out an argument about a particular topic I’m doing a deep dive on. On stage, the goal is to get the laughs without, of course,

compromising your values. You get immediate feedback. During the pandemic, I’ve missed hearing people’s laughter.

What’s wonderful about *The Bitchuation Room* podcast is I get to bring my full self to it. I get to be inane and irreverent and be deeply interested in the topics — climate change, capitalism, rewriting the Constitution, etc. In left spaces, there’s often a demand you either be a clown or a super-serious militant. When you can mix the two it’s a beautiful combo. Imagine, for example, facilitating a climate change discussion between Bill McKibben and a political comic and seeing where it goes. There aren’t many spaces for that, but I’ve been able to carve one out.

You’ve become a brand.

Ugh, I hate the journey into brandhood. There’s good things about starting your own podcast and being independent. I am grateful for the support I get from people who like my show and my comedy. But, there’s also the reality that being an influencer or a brand is kind of just another way that capitalism has created a gig economy for the entertainment world.

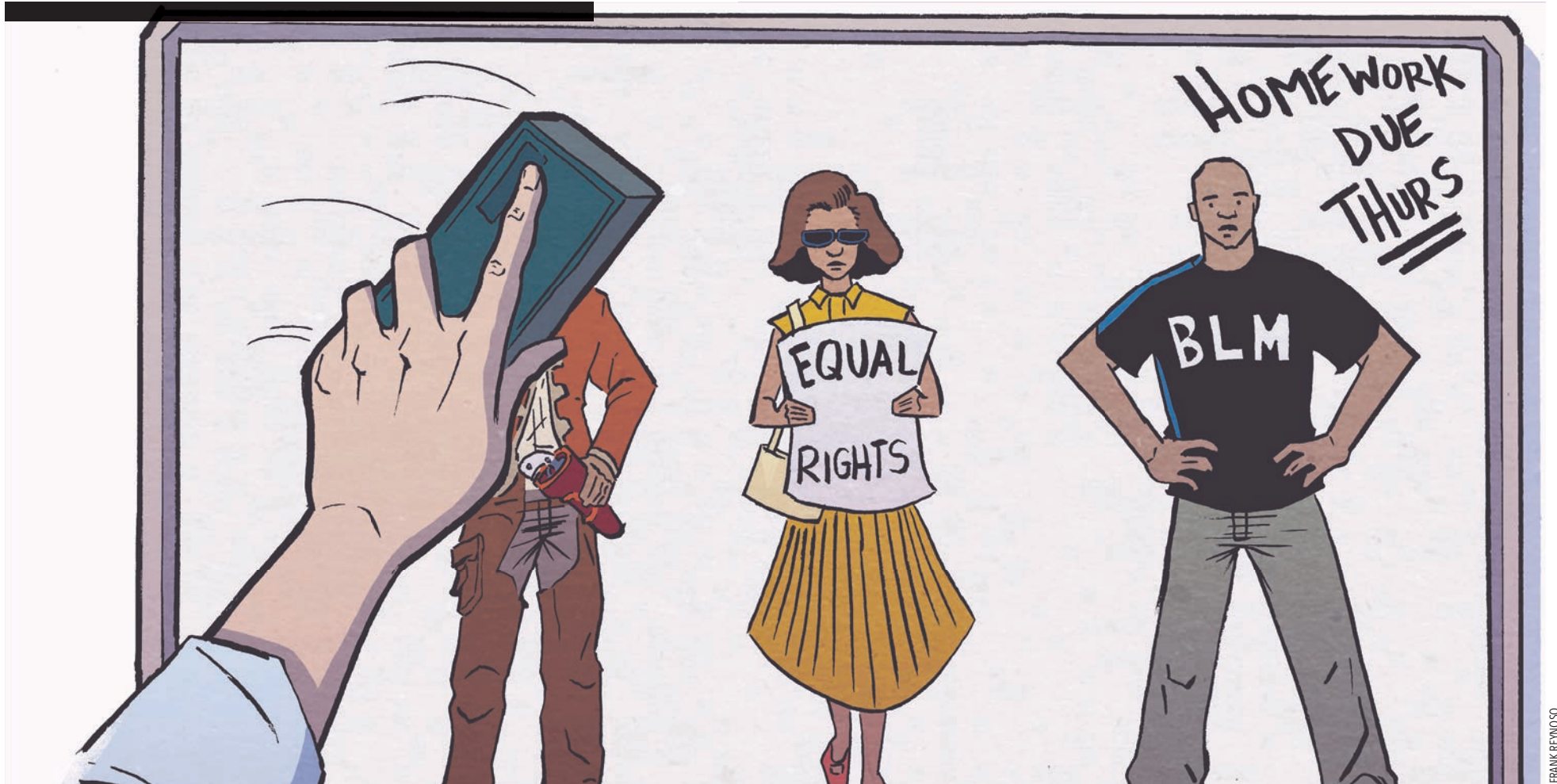
The algorithms of places like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are very demanding. I often find myself making more promotional content than writing or doing something creative. You have to vie for shrinking attention spans. There’s not a lot of glamor or protection in that.

What do you see as the future of comedy?

I think we’re heading for a “shit-is-getting-real” moment where the window for whether things are still funny is closing and the window for real fascism is getting wider, especially with Biden not rising to the task at hand. What that means for comedy is people will have more of an appetite for comedy that honestly sounds like political speech, like rabble rousing. It won’t feel stale, because we’ll be like, “I have my pitchfork. Let’s go.”

Francesca Fiorentini will host a live Bitchuation Room podcast Thursday March 10 at The Bell House in Brooklyn. Special guests will include City Councilmember Tiffany Cabán, Sam Seder of The Majority Report and political comic Matt Lieb. For more, see twitter.com/franifio.

FRANCESCA FIORENTINI WILL HOST A LIVE BITCHUATION ROOM PODCAST THURSDAY MARCH 10 AT THE BELL HOUSE IN BROOKLYN. SPECIAL GUESTS WILL INCLUDE CITY COUNCILMEMBER TIFFANY CABÁN, SAM SEDER OF THE MAJORITY REPORT AND POLITICAL COMIC MATT LIEB. FOR MORE, SEE TWITTER.COM/FRANIFIO.



FRANK REYNOLDS

TIME FOR THE LEFT TO EMBRACE CRITICAL RACE THEORY DEBATE

PRETENDING CRT ISN'T REAL ROBS OF US OF THE CHANCE TO MOUNT A STRONG DEFENSE

BY LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

Critical race theory (CRT) is being attacked by the far right all around the country, with angry opponents filling school-board meetings. Florida, Tennessee, Idaho, Iowa, Arkansas, New Hampshire and Oklahoma have already banned or restricted its presence in the classroom, and 16 more states are currently debating whether to enact similar laws. A California school-board president told Fox News last August that CRT is trying to “drive a wedge between various groups in America, various ethnic groups, and to use that to absolutely ruin our nation.”

CRT supporters' principal defense has been to claim that its opponents are simply ignorant: they don't know what critical race theory is, or that it is only taught in law schools. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote in his Jan. 24 column that CRT “isn't actually being taught in public schools.” MSNBC pundits have called it a “unicorn.” This just feeds the sense that “liberal elites” take the hoi polloi to be uneducated birdbrains.

Fox News, despite its efforts, is not capable of making unicorns look like real horses. The opponents of CRT know that it claims that structural racism is embedded in U.S. history and current institutions. This topic is playing out in public classrooms. Teacher training for some years has beefed up segments on teaching racism; unlike a generation ago, textbooks today cover the history of slavery in some depth. Readily available classroom resources include units on racism and police violence, whiteness, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

If the youth of this country are regularly exposed to such content, they will begin to ask questions, and their patriotism may be at risk. In the best-case scenario, this could lead to a more multiracial democracy than we have ever had.

We need to recognize that this is a serious and legitimate debate. How do we create a meaningful democracy when large groups of people have such different historical relationships to the country? Thomas Jefferson suggested that slaves should be sent back to Africa after slavery was abolished, because he didn't believe a united political community could be formed given the enmity slavery caused. But we haven't given building that kind of community a real try yet.

The current debate over CRT is an opportunity. The harder of us should enter these Parent-Teacher Association and school-board meetings and organize more venues for open discussion. Invite the press; arrange for regular white folks (i.e. not professors)

to speak to the issue; offer a reasoned counterview to the U.S.-can-do-no-wrong cheerleading; address concerns about children's mental well-being with empathy; and complicate the category of “whiteness” with intersectionality.

Here are some suggested dos and don'ts:

1) Stop denying that critical race theory is being taught. Yes, strictly speaking, CRT began as an approach to reading legal judgments for their subtle racism. But the concept is now being used interchangeably with any attempt to grapple with slavery, colonialism, genocide, and racism in the history of the United States. Opponents of CRT are concerned that addressing these histories will bring the country down, that it means cultural suicide. To counter this with simplistic logic is inadequate and even offensive: People need hope, a motive for patience and the ability to participate meaningfully in reframing their own understanding of who they are and who we together might become.

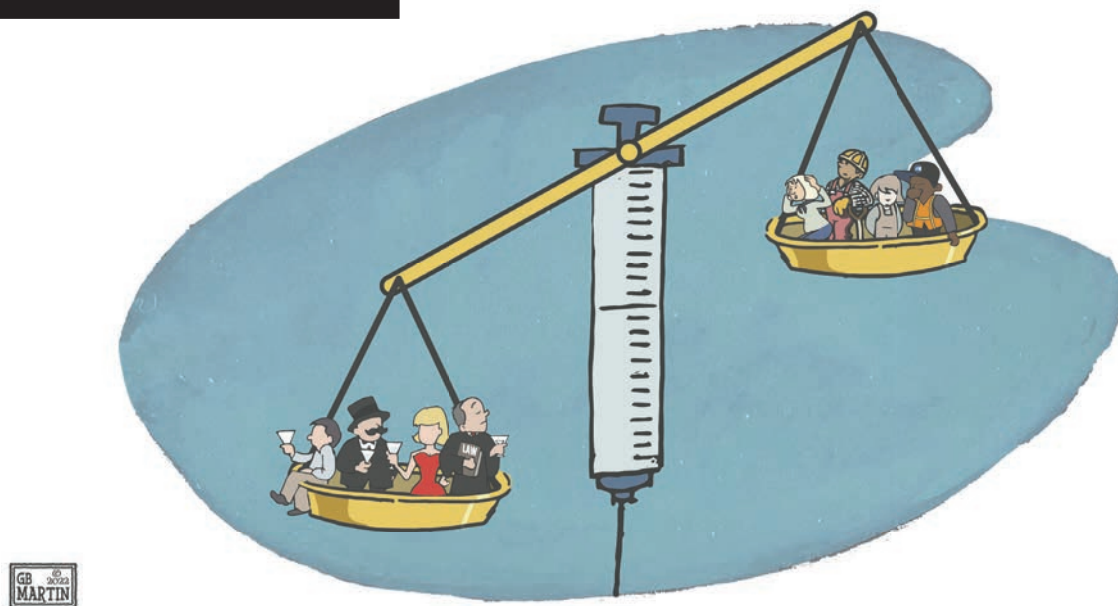
2) Explore ways in which the past matters today. European and U.S. empire-building created the world as it looks today. Cumulative advantages accrue across generations even in the absence of racist intent. But the past is not all one unending story of crime and horror. We can also find moving stories of resistance in our national history, which can plant seeds of hope and inform concrete agendas. This country forfeited a huge opportunity for moral and political advance when Reconstruction was dismantled; studying that period and others can help us chart a way forward.

3) Admit that whites may experience these new educational initiatives differently. An important aspect of white American identity is the “Ameri-

WE CAN ALSO FIND MOVING STORIES OF RESISTANCE IN OUR NATIONAL HISTORY WHICH CAN PLANT SEEDS OF HOPE.

can identity” part, as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's recent gaffe indicates. For many, “America” connotes concepts like world leader, democracy and a charitable people. It looks different when we consider slavery, the genocide against Native Americans or the bloody imperial ventures that the United States has embarked on. Many white individuals are scared of blowback. But we need to think beyond individual responsibility, as CRT explains, and we need to recognize that we are all connected in some way, whether biological or not, to some pretty great people and traditions. We have many elements to build on as we revise the country's history. We can still have peaceful parks and neighborhoods, integrated schools that sometimes work well, and

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MARTIN

GARY MARTIN

SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF COVID

AND SETS THE STAGE FOR FURTHER EFFORTS TO DISMANTLE THE “ADMINISTRATIVE STATE.”

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

WASHINGTON—The case could have been called *OSHA v. COVID* — and the Supreme Court ruled in favor of COVID.

On Jan. 13, the Court ruled 6-3 to delay the Biden administration’s temporary emergency workplace vaccine regulations indefinitely, until lawsuits challenging them can be decided.

On strict partisan lines, it held that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) had overreached its authority to regulate workplace hazards when it ordered all employers with 100 or more workers to ensure that they are vaccinated against COVID-19 or get tested for it weekly. It said OSHA had the power “to set workplace safety standards, not broad public-health measures.”

The news broke as I was returning from covering a protest at Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx, in which overloaded nurses depicted a health system on the verge of collapse after decades of disinvestment and two years of COVID, with the halls outside the emergency room filled with beds for patients waiting for rooms. New York State Nurses Association leader Pat Kane said the number of workers in the city’s health and hospital system testing positive for COVID had shot from 154 in November to almost 3,000 in December.

The Court’s oral arguments on the case Jan. 7 echoed those wildly disparate worlds. The three more liberal justices and OSHA’s lawyer were like “THERE’S A PANDEMIC THAT’S KILLED MORE THAN 800,000 AMERICANS!” The six far-right justices focused on the legal question of whether OSHA’s power to issue temporary emergency standards to protect workers exposed to “grave danger” from “physically harmful substances” and “new hazards” applied, because Congress had not explicitly authorized it to ordain mass vaccinations of workers.

They concluded that “although COVID-19 is a risk that occurs in many workplaces, it is not an occupational hazard in most.” (In a separate case, the Court lifted an injunction against the Department of Health and Human Services’ emergency vaccination regulations for workers in facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid funds — a

much narrower mandate.)

The counterargument by OSHA, the federal government, and Justices Stephen Breyer, Elena Kagan, and Sonia Sotomayor could be boiled down to three sentences. The 1970 law that established OSHA authorizes it to protect workers from exposure to lethal substances. Many COVID deaths have come from workplace exposure, as contagious respiratory diseases are a grave danger for people breathing in an enclosed space eight hours a day. And vaccines are the single most effective way to protect against infection.

OSHA has never issued such a large-scale regulation, affecting an estimated 84 million workers, in its 51-year history, Chief Justice John Roberts and others argued. But, Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Prelogar told the Court Jan. 7, the agency has never had to deal with a public-health crisis of this magnitude, the worst since the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 killed some 675,000 Americans.

Emergencies do not give governments unlimited power. The 9/11 attacks were the most lethal on American soil since the Civil War, but that wasn’t a valid justification for sending an undercover police officer on a rafting trip with a Muslim student group from City College, or torturing suspected terrorists and calling it “enhanced interrogation.”

But a basic principle of epidemiology is that vaccines are not just for protecting the individual who gets one, but to protect others. A large part of this is by shrinking the pool of potential hosts to deny the pathogen the opportunity to evolve into a more contagious, more virulent, or drug-resistant form.

There have been two massive failures of this with COVID. First, the lack of vaccine distribution in Africa, the least lucrative continent in the world for drug companies, means barely 7% of people there were fully vaccinated as of mid-January, according to World Health Organization figures. That is a pool of more than 1 billion potential hosts. South Africa, with 27% of its people vaccinated, is doing better, but that was far from sufficient to prevent the emergence of the Omicron variant, contagious enough to infect some vaccinated people.

Second, the sheer number of morons — no milder word would be accurate — in the U.S. and Europe who refuse to get vaccinated, a large, loud, and occasionally violent minority that denies 225 years of medical science for a mess of quackage.

The Court appeared to have an undercurrent of sympathy for anti-vaxxers. Justice Clarence Thomas, dissenting against letting the regulations for healthcare workers go into effect, argued that they would compel millions of workers “to undergo an unwanted medical procedure that ‘cannot be removed at the end of the shift.’” In oral arguments, Justice Samuel Alito said that the regulations would force unvaccinated workers who, however foolishly, wanted to “balance the risks presented to their health” to undergo a medical procedure that would be with them for the rest of their lives.

More explicit was what could be called “COVID denial-lite.” In oral arguments, Ohio Solicitor General Benjamin N. Flowers questioned whether there really was a “grave danger” when unvaccinated people aged 18 to 29 have a lower risk of dying of COVID than vaccinated people 50 to 64.

Focusing on deaths exclusively excludes the danger of

infecting others and of long-term COVID, and, according to Centers for Disease Control data from late November, the death rate for unvaccinated 18-to-29-year-olds was 17 times that of vaccinated people the same age.

The Court’s majority reflects that the Republicans have become fierce advocates of the right to spread COVID, with even those not in the antivax-quack faction denouncing vaccine and mask regulations as “tyrannical” and “Faucism.” Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has spent the past year battling to ban local safety measures, such as Austin’s Jan. 13 order granting businesses the right to require masks or bar unvaccinated customers. Governors Ron DeSantis of Florida, Glenn Youngkin of Virginia, and Kristi Noem of South Dakota have taken similar stances.

The far-right justices have also indicated that they want to undermine the legal bases for many government regulations. In a concurring opinion, Justices Neil Gorsuch, Thomas, and Alito argued that if OSHA’s interpretation of the law was valid, then Congress had unconstitutionally delegated its authority to the agency. A key target is the 1984 precedent of *Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, which held that courts should defer to federal agencies’ interpretation of a law they administer as long as it’s reasonable and doesn’t contradict the statute.

When courts are deciding whether to issue a stay, one of the two main legal principles is which side will suffer more damage from the delay. The Court’s majority framed that question as a choice between a mandate that will force employers “to incur billions of dollars in unrecoverable compliance costs and will cause hundreds of thousands of employees to leave their jobs” versus OSHA’s projection that it would save over 6,500 lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations.

“It is not our role to weigh such tradeoffs,” they concluded, ruling that Congress had not given OSHA the power to “regulate public health more broadly.”

Which constitutes more damage? Quitting your job or getting fired because you refuse to take a simple public-health precaution, or dying in agony from a virulent respiratory disease?

“As disease and death continue to mount, this Court tells the agency that it cannot respond in the most effective way possible,” Justices Breyer, Kagan, and Sotomayor concluded in their dissent.

A version of this article originally appeared at Labor-Press.org



GARY MARTIN

COVID & THE VIEW FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

BY MANVI JALAN

KOLKATA, INDIA—“I’ll see you soon.” We cast a spell and call it hope, waiting helplessly for “soon” to arrive. The ‘Rona years have held us prisoner, separated us from the ones we love, cleaved our lives apart. Does the world feel smaller, borderless, when we wake up to our screens, and hold each other through language, across time and space? Do the borders between us dissolve in this virtual utopia-hellscape?

The borders enforced during COVID-19 hold us hostage, a stark reinforcement of colonial-era inequalities, a reminder that we are the most expendable, that separation may last far longer than disease. The pandemic reinforced the oppression of the historically disenfranchised, us who lose the birth lottery.

My close friend Siddhartha’s father has touched death and survived for the third time. There won’t be a fourth. The pandemic rages on. His sister Chagan waits from San Francisco for travel restrictions to ease. She’s luckier than most. A U.S. permanent resident, she’s less likely to get indefinitely stuck in India. After two years of waiting, an anxious Chagan found a flight to Kolkata to see her father in January. Flights are hard to come by and incredibly expensive; travel restrictions shift every day.

June 2021: I got a text from my friend Sarika. Her aging grandmother, who struggles with hearing loss and dementia, was now alone in Kolkata after the death of her sister, her only living family in India. Stuck in Maryland, Sarika’s mother tried to come to India and take grandma to the United States. But with embassies closed, emergency visas taking weeks or months to process, barely any operating flights and uncertain travel restrictions, they couldn’t afford to get stuck in a now-unfamiliar India. I helped them find a nurse to accompany grandmother in the case they’d figure out the necessary paperwork to get her into the United States.

In stark contrast, the global elite has spent these last two years buying superyachts and holidaying in countries that rely on tourism to survive like the Maldives: Boris Johnson threw a bunch of parties under his own lockdown and vaccinated folks with powerful passports have had the luxury of moving freely.

IT’S YEAR 3

We now know that travel bans come too late to curb global transmission. We have consistent and effective regulations

and safety protocols. The World Health Organization states, “Blanket travel bans will not prevent the international spread, and they place a heavy burden on lives and livelihoods. In addition, they can adversely impact global health efforts during a pandemic by disincentivizing countries to report and share epidemiological and sequencing data.” When the Omicron variant was first identified in South Africa, the UK, EU and United States were quick to issue travel bans on several countries in Southern Africa even though COVID cases were low and Omicron had not yet been identified in some of these countries. Borders remained open between the United States and European countries invaded by Omicron.

It took until November for WHO to officially recognise Covaxin, an Indian vaccine that faced trouble being globally accepted, leaving vaccinated Indians unable to travel until December.

Indian vaccines and vaccine “passports” — a certificate that gives vaccinated citizens the green light to travel internationally — are not recognized by all countries. The Indian government’s faulty processing has also led to incorrect birthdays on certificates they refuse to fix. A family immigrating to the UK was even suspected of fraud because Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s photograph is printed on every “passport.”

Travel and immigration for citizens of the global South has always been notoriously difficult — but with COVID tightening borders, shutting down and delaying immigration procedures when embassies could’ve gone virtual to prevent backlogs, it seems our lives will be uprooted for several years to come.

It’s easy to dismiss these temporary borders as an essential health and safety issue. But if you look at how a million migrants seeking asylum on the southwest border of the U.S. were barred entry under the pretense that a flow of unvaccinated immigrants would endanger U.S. citizens, despite immigration law that mandates the United States welcome asylum seekers, vaccinate them and give them adequate health care dictated by local protocol, the sinister reality becomes clear. Under the guise of health safety, COVID has served as an excuse for rich countries to reinforce the borders that divide them from us. The fallout: families separated across borders, stranded indefinitely, refugees unable to flee their countries, austerity violently tightening in “developing” countries sent back years, decades of World Bank debt payments.

WESTERN ARROGANCE

India, 48.6% vaccinated, is now facing a vaccine shortage, and boosters are far from being accessible in public hospitals. When India — the leading country in vaccine production — produced the Astrazeneca vaccine locally under the name Covishield, we were legally bound to sell a percentage of those shots to the UK, leaving millions of us unvaccinated.

Human Rights Watch reports, “There are over 100 companies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America who have the capacity to make an mRNA vaccine ... All they need is for the U.S. and German governments to end monopolies and share the valuable technology they funded and essentially created with them.”

Western countries consistently undermined foreign vac-

cines. While millions of vaccines rot in their storehouses, they refuse to democratize technology by sharing vaccine patents so other countries can make and distribute low-cost vaccines to their people who were failed by the COVAX program, under which WHO and Unicef promised to redistribute vaccines they hoped rich countries would donate. All to reinforces the global oppression and Western arrogance I’ve known my whole life: Wealthy countries cure hunger on their terms — by distributing granola bars rather than stopping their corporate-interest-driven land rape, rather than globally canceling debts or redistributing wealth so the rest of the world can afford once again to reap the harvests of our own land.

If we can have McDonalds in every country, why pray tell, can we not have vaccines globally available? If our collective health and safety is truly a concern for world leaders, why are countries like Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States refusing to share vaccine patents? Why aren’t they sharing the extra doses they have rotting in storehouses?

BORDERLESS DYSTOPIA/UTOPIA

Under COVID, governmental surveillance, border control and policing of migrants and citizens have increased. What’s the incentive for governments to rein in surveillance when the pandemic is over? The pandemic has given birth to centi-billionaires while the incomes of 99% of humanity fell and 160 million people were thrown into poverty. In what feels like an empathy-devoid dystopia where we hear the “post-truth” so often, our trust in the system has evaporated.

The pandemic shifted perceptions of time and space. The global lockdown reeled us into a shared moment that most everyone was suddenly trapped inside; lucky ones experienced each other in small groups or in the virtual world. As tightening physical borders drove us into isolation, emotional borders dissolved in our intimate lives as we reached out in search of love, community and connection. In the virtual realm, there are no borders, we convene from across time zones to share space.

As we are isolated from physically collective experiences, our collective consciousness shrinks. Connecting in the virtual world is our way, perhaps, of trying to keep these connections alive. Paradoxically, virtual space offers more “global mobility” ... does this experience of a borderless virtual world fuel a desire to manifest a more borderless world physically?

In poetic imagination, the pause has led some to confront their shadows, break down their barriers and shift focus towards empathy. Illusions of individualistic survival, of identity as defined by borders, are crumbling. Hope lies in imagining a better future. We need this nightmare to end, and to do that, collective action and open borders are necessary.

In my imagination, a utopic decolonization is one where everyone has the opportunity to move freely across open borders and create diverse communities across the globe. In my fantasies, we dose the most powerful with psychedelic medicine that forces them to peacefully return the billions they have stolen from us. The void created by their crumpled egos will be filled by an influx of universal love and realization of the fundamental truth that any system that denies people their freedom, is unsustainable.



THE U.S. IS REAPING WHAT IT SOWED IN UKRAINE

BY MEDEA BENJAMIN & NICOLAS DAVIES

What are Americans to believe about the rising tensions over Ukraine? The United States and Russia both claim their escalations are defensive, responding to threats by the other side, but the resulting spiral of escalation can only make war more likely. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is warning that “panic” by U.S. and Western leaders is already causing economic destabilization in the country.

Not all U.S. allies support its current policy. Germany is refusing to funnel more weapons into Ukraine, in keeping with its longstanding policy of not sending weapons into conflict zones.

“The Minsk Agreement hasn’t been applied by both sides,” German Social Democrat Member of Parliament Ralf Stegner told the BBC Jan. 25, referring to the process agreed to by France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine in 2015 for the ending the civil war between the Ukrainian government and ethnic Russian separatists in the country’s east. “It just doesn’t make any sense to think that forcing up the military possibilities would make it better. Rather, I think it’s the hour of diplomacy.”

Most American politicians and corporate media, however, have fallen in line with a one-sided narrative that paints Russia as the aggressor, and support sending more weapons to Ukrainian government forces. The most critical events

that have been airbrushed out of that narrative are the violation of agreements Western leaders made at the end of the Cold War not to expand NATO into Eastern Europe, and the U.S.-backed coup in Ukraine in February 2014.

Western mainstream media accounts date the crisis in Ukraine back to Russia’s 2014 reintegration of Crimea, and the decision by ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine to secede as the Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics.

But these were not unprovoked actions. They were responses to the U.S.-backed coup, in which an armed mob that included the neo-Nazi Right Sector militia stormed the Ukrainian parliament, forcing the elected president, Viktor Yanukovich, and members of his party to flee for their lives. The remaining members of parliament voted to form a new government, subverting the political transition and plans for a new election that Yanukovich had publicly agreed to the day before, after meetings with the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland.

The U.S. role in managing the coup was exposed by a leaked 2014 audio recording of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and U.S. Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt working on their plans, which included sidelining the European Union (“Fuck the EU,” as Nuland put it) and shoehorning in U.S. protégé Arseniy Yatsenyuk as prime minister.

Prime Minister Yatsenyuk was forced to resign after two years when a corruption scandal broke, and President Petro

explicitly cut off its funding in defense appropriations for the 2018 fiscal year.

In 2015, the Minsk and Normandy negotiations led to a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from a buffer zone around the separatist-held areas. Ukraine agreed to grant greater autonomy to Donetsk, Luhansk and other ethnically Russian areas of Ukraine, but it has failed to follow through on that.

A federal system, with some powers devolved to individual provinces or regions, could help resolve the all-or-nothing power struggle between Ukrainian nationalists and Ukraine’s traditional ties to Russia that has dogged its politics since independence in 1991.

But the U.S. and NATO’s interest in Ukraine is not really about resolving its regional differences. The U.S.-backed coup in 2014 was calculated to put Russia in an impossible position. If Russia did nothing, post-coup Ukraine would sooner or later join NATO, as NATO members already agreed to in principle in 2008. That would mean NATO forces would advance right up to Russia’s border.

On the other hand, if Russia had responded to the coup by invading Ukraine, there would have been no turning back from a disastrous new Cold War with the West. To Washington’s frustration, Russia found a middle path out of this dilemma, by accepting the result of Crimea’s referendum to rejoin Russia, but only giving covert support to the

FAMILY VALUES:

New Yorkers rallied at Times Square on Feb. 5 to protest the U.S. escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. Similar antiwar demonstrations were held on the same day in dozens of cities across the country.

WILL THE PROSPECT OF A 21ST-CENTURY VERSION OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS BE ENOUGH TO BRING AMERICA’S IRRESPONSIBLE LEADERS TO THEIR SENSES?

Poroshenko was outed in a tax evasion scandal revealed in the Panama Papers. Ukraine remains the poorest country in Europe, and one of the most corrupt.

The Ukrainian military had little enthusiasm for a civil war against its own people in eastern Ukraine, so the post-coup government formed new “National Guard” units to assault the separatist-declared republics. The infamous Azov Battalion drew its first recruits from the Right Sector militia and openly displays neo-Nazi symbols, yet it has kept receiving U.S. arms and training, even after Congress

separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk.

In 2021, with Victoria Nuland back in the State Department, the Biden administration quickly cooked up a plan to put Russia in a new pickle. The United States had given Ukraine \$2 billion in military aid since 2014, and Biden has added another \$650 million to that, along with deployments of U.S. and NATO military trainers.

Ukraine has still not implemented the constitutional

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HUMANITY'S HISTORY, RETOLD

The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity

BY DAVID GRAEBER & DAVID WENGROW

FARRAR, STRAUS & GIROUX, NOV. 2021, 692 PAGES

By Steven Sherman

For the 10 years before his death in 2020, David Graeber was perhaps the most prominent left public intellectual in the world. And unlike other contenders, such as David Harvey and Slavoj Žižek, he immersed himself in the world of social movements, playing a concrete role in organizing Occupy Wall Street. His posthumous book, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, co-authored with archeologist David Wengrow, is a major event: A best-selling far-left text that is a direct challenge to conventional wisdom on many fronts. Critics better versed in the last couple of decades of archeological and anthropological research will no doubt offer empirically grounded assessments. From my position, this book is a huge prod to utopian thinking that touches on many topics unfamiliar to most readers. At the same time, for all its ambitions, it sidesteps or avoids a few key areas.

The Dawn of Everything begins with a lengthy section of throat-clearing, in which Graeber and Wengrow hope to make clear the inadequacies of an evolutionary perspective on human history and the related question of the origins of social inequality. The evolutionary perspective, in which social organization was propelled forward by productive advances, most notably agriculture, and ascended from small, mobile bands to chiefdoms to empires and eventually nation-states, has been critiqued by anthropologists for decades, but it remains influential both within academic life and for public intellectuals like Stephen Pinker and Jared Diamond.

This has long been related to the question, “What are the origins of social inequality?” Graeber and Wengrow offer plenty of evidence that the evolutionary process for human societies was more uneven than has been suggested, and that centralized power by no means held a monopoly on technological innovations. Ultimately, they offer a somewhat different account of the “fall from grace.” In their view, humans have always been political animals, reinventing their social relations. What were once conceived as three fundamental rights, however — the right to disobey, the right to flee, and the right to reinvent social relations — have largely been forgotten or cast aside. So now, we are stuck with territorial states that enforce obedience with guns and traduce any rights to flee or reinvent ourselves.

This brings us to the book’s second orienting framework, the substitution of the question “How did we (virtually all of humanity) get stuck with territorial states?” for “What are the origins of social inequality?” They never really offer a convincing answer, nor do they consider seriously that the origins-of-inequality question is far more popular because virtually everyone on the left of the political spectrum agrees that extreme inequality is a problem, while there is nothing remotely like such a consensus around the existence of states. Nevertheless, the trip they take through early human history inspired by these questions is highly illuminating, and will shake up many readers’ preconceptions.

The Dawn of Everything hardly offers a linear perspective on early human history, if such a thing were possible.

It jumps around from hemisphere to hemisphere, continent to continent, region to region. It says little about Western European social structures after the heyday of the ancient Greeks, but in North America, it traces some patterns through the contact between Western imperialists and indigenous peoples from the 15th through 18th centuries.

Nevertheless, the unifying vision is strong, and their thematic emphasis is clear. Throughout, they argue that self-consciousness about political arrangements is pretty much the essence of humans, as much a part of the consciousness of smaller groups with little technology as it is for modern people, who often lose sight of their own political capacity, as states seem natural and unmovable. Whereas evolutionary perspectives (including Marxism) tend to argue that survival impels technological innovation, which in turn enables and even necessitates transforming social structures, for Graeber and Wengrow, early humanity was far more playful.

They emphasize that some groups had seasonal social structures, toggling between more egalitarian and more hierarchical structures depending on the time of year. States emerge but also dissolve — sometimes, they hint, without providing much evidence, because of rebellious rejection of hierarchy. Different peoples go in different directions because of schismogenesis, literally “creation

for rituals than as centralized rulers’ grand schemes to generate a surplus. Centers of power here aren’t the initiators of technology so much as the appropriators, after bands of marauding men conquer the anarchistic cities.

States, which combine violence, administration (knowledge as power) and charisma, contingently emerge and sometimes fall apart again. In one of the most vivid of the many narratives sketched in the book, the pre-conquest history of North America is depicted as one where a centralized state rose and fell hundreds of years before Europeans invaded, and was eventually replaced by smaller groups that had nevertheless developed ways to interact over vast distances. That state rule was remembered in myth as despised memories of those who sought to order people around. Ultimately, this was the context for the European encounter in the 18th century with indigenous people who could confidently defend their anarchistic societies and deliver powerful critiques of European social organization. In Graeber and Wengrow’s view, the encounter with these views was crucial to the shift associated with the Enlightenment, when elite European thought began to celebrate freedom instead of viewing it negatively.

As they focus, more or less, on the rise of states, several other highly relevant topics get short shrift. Religion is largely seen as the rituals deployed to hold things together.

Universal, expansionary, proselytizing faiths like Christianity and Islam are ignored, although they have implications for all the questions Graeber and Wengrow are interested in. The playful aspect of trade — collecting shells just because, more or less — is emphasized, and proto-capitalist elements, in which rulers and others seized upon opportunities to accumulate money ceaselessly, are ignored, although there are many examples of that even in early history.

The efforts to answer the question “how did we get stuck with states now covering the entirety of the world” are disappointing. At times they seem

to argue that, as if in some dystopian nightmare fiction, playful rituals unexpectedly turn deadly serious and immutable; a person appointed king for a day becomes one. Later they indicate that perhaps charitable efforts, such as bringing widows or orphans into a temple, turn into permanent power over the subjects being helped.

But the covering of the globe with territorial states is a modern, recent feature. Two highly relevant dynamics go unmentioned. First, constant warfare in Europe following the collapse of the Roman Empire ultimately required the rise of state-like structures to defend against neighbors, and European power struggles tended to expand to cover more and more of the globe. Second, for most of the 20th century, there was a strong conviction among colonized elites that having modern states of their own was the road to modernity and prosperity. This conviction has been shaken by the lackluster results of post-colonial independence, and power has migrated up toward transnational bureaucracies like the World Trade Organization and downward toward non-state movements like the Zapatistas in Mexico and Kurdish Rojava in northwest Syria.

It is in line with the spirit of this book to ponder what future combinations of states, transnational organizations, and movements will emerge over the next century. Whether they will reinforce or undo inequality and domination, is entirely uncertain.



GABRIELLA SPUNT

of division,” an anthropological term for the process of differentiating themselves from each other, rather than deep environmental factors.

Far from history being a story of more and more complex administration producing greater and greater surpluses, the authors emphasize the production of playful rituals that may not have been designed to legitimize permanent hierarchies. They argue, for example, against using elaborate Ice Age burials as evidence of an early turn toward hierarchy. Perhaps the people being buried in these ways weren’t at the top of social hierarchies at all; maybe they were eccentric or differently esteemed. The emphasis on political experimentation and playful rituals not coincidentally bears a certain resemblance to Graeber’s own political practice with the alter-globalization movement of the early 2000s and Occupy Wall Street.

The authors regularly confound readers’ expectations about early humanity. Before agriculture, they say, humans had wider horizons, traveling far throughout their lives and managing relations with groups that covered even more territory, perhaps leaving and joining different groups as they wished. It is more contemporary humans whose space has shrunk. Cities weren’t necessarily the product of empires and kings, they write; many emerged without central rule, running themselves as a series of neighborhoods that managed to function together. Administration and math probably didn’t emerge from the needs of centers of power but were rather technologies that began on a small scale, likely through the initiatives of women. Some of these emergent cultural areas probably had a matriarchal aspect. Early agriculture is better conceptualized as women gardening to cultivate plants

UKRAINE

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changes called for in the Minsk agreements, and the military support the United States and NATO have provided has encouraged its leaders to effectively abandon the Minsk-Normandy process and simply reassert sovereignty over all of Ukraine's territory, including Crimea.

In practice, Ukraine could only recover those territories by a major escalation of the civil war. When it began shipping military equipment south and east towards Crimea and the Donbass region in March 2021, Russia responded by moving troops and conducting military exercises close enough to Ukraine to deter any new offensive.

In October, Ukraine launched new attacks in Donbass. Russia, which still had about 100,000 troops stationed near Ukraine, responded with new troop movements and military exercises.

Underlying all these tensions is NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe, in violation of commitments Western officials made at the end of the Cold War. Russian officials are warning that U.S.-Russian relations are close to the breaking point. If the United States and NATO are not prepared to negotiate new disarmament treaties, remove U.S. missiles from countries within range of Russia, and dial back NATO expansion, Russian officials say they will have no option but to respond with "appropriate military-technical reciprocal measures."

This expression may not refer to an in-

vasion of Ukraine, as most Western commentators have assumed, but to a broader strategy that could include actions that hit much closer to home for Western leaders.

For example, Russia could place short-range nuclear missiles in Kaliningrad (between Lithuania and Poland), within range of European capitals. It could establish military bases in Iran, Cuba, Venezuela and other friendly countries. It could deploy submarines armed with hypersonic nuclear missiles to the western Atlantic, from where they could destroy Washington in minutes.

It has long been a common refrain among American activists to point to the 800 or so U.S. military bases all over the world and ask, "How would Americans like it if Russia built military bases in Mexico or Cuba?" We may be about to find out.

Hypersonic nuclear missiles off the East Coast would put the United States in a similar position to that in which NATO has placed the Russians. So the revived Cold War that U.S. officials and corporate media hacks have been mindlessly cheering on could very quickly turn into one in which the United States would find itself just as encircled and endangered as its enemies.

Will the prospect of such a 21st century Cuban missile crisis be enough to bring America's irresponsible leaders back to the negotiating table? We certainly hope so.

WAR IS A RACKET

Raytheon made \$6.4 billion in profit in 2021 on \$64.4 billion in total sales. During a Jan. 25 conference call with investors, Raytheon CEO Greg Hayes was asked about the possibility of "rising tension" among global powers boosting the giant military

contractor's earnings. This was his reply.

The answer is obviously we are seeing, I would say, opportunities for international sales. We just have to look to the last week, where we saw the drone attack in the UAE, which attacked some of their other facilities, and of course the tensions in

Eastern Europe, the tensions in the South China Sea. All of those things are putting pressure on some of the defense spending over there. So, I fully expect we're going to see some benefit from it.

— INDEPENDENT STAFF

LEAVE A LEGACY OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA

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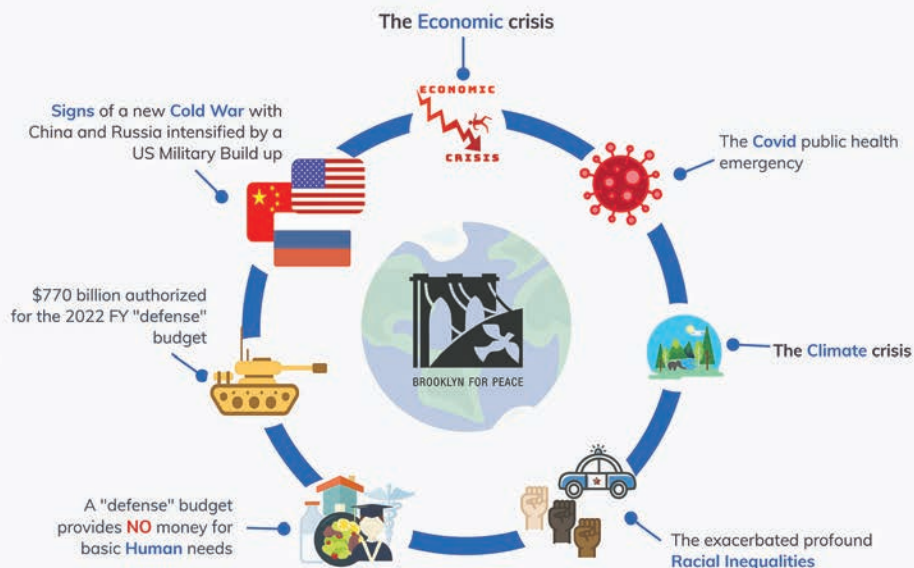
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KNOW THY ENEMY

Exposing the Right and Fighting for Democracy: Celebrating Chip Berlet as Journalist and Scholar

EDITED BY PAM CHAMBERLAIN, MATTHEW N. LYONS, ABBY SCHER & SPENCER SUNSHINE

ROUTLEDGE — 2021 — 229 PAGES

By Eleanor J. Bader

Whenever a noted luminary dies, tributes quickly pour in to laud their contributions to society and pay homage to their character. It's touching and meaningful, of course, but I always have mixed feelings about these testimonials, hoping the person being feted knew how valued they were and wishing they'd been able to read or hear the appreciative comments.

A newly-released anthology about the 40-plus year career of right-wing watcher, writer, activist and researcher Chip Berlet sidesteps this issue, since it was released in honor of his retirement, and I can only hope that reading *Exposing the Right and Fighting for Democracy* gives him reason to smile. Forty-seven contributors — personal friends as well as colleagues from Political Research Associates (PRA), the Massachusetts-based think tank where he spent the bulk of his career, join a host of appreciative fellow travelers to recognize his insights and thank him for his kind and patient instruction.

In sum, what emerges is a portrait of a true mensch, a man who recognized the importance of studying both the religious and secular right when others on the left thought it unnecessary or even silly. To his credit, Berlet sought to understand — rather than lampoon — those whose positions are anathema to progressive values, folks whose organizing props up racism, heteropatriarchy, antisemitism and homophobia.

Here's an example. When *Guardian* reporter Jason Wilson consulted Berlet about the Ammon Bundy-led occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016, Berlet helped him see that, despite being misled by far-right ideology, the protesters were responding to something real: Increasing disparities in wealth, a collapsing rural economy and the implosion of the American Dream. But Berlet did not stop at deconstructing the occupation. Instead, he schooled Wilson about the extent of the right's reach, noting that a pervasive fear of change — terror that people of color, Jews, queers and members of the trans community would soon outnumber white Christians — form the crux of contemporary political backlash.

Today's conservative attempts to take over local library and school boards and keep public school pupils from learning the true extent of American racial bigotry prove the prescience of Berlet's analysis.

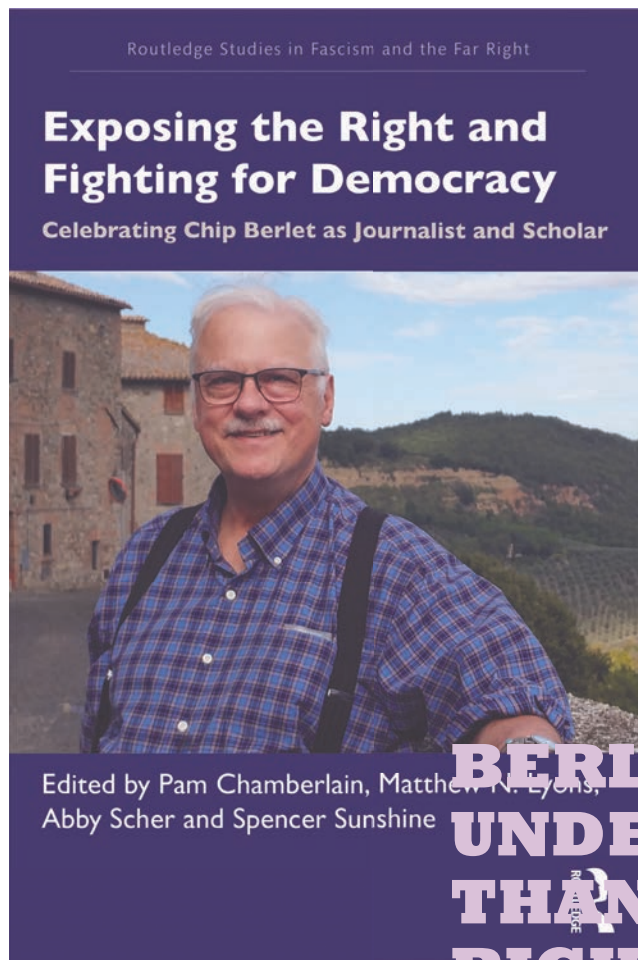
Likewise for understanding the evangelical and Pentecostal communities. These groups, former PRA staffer Abby Scher writes, believe in a literal

and other Democrats as abducting child abusers," while Christian Republicans label middle-of-the-road Dems as so "godless" that they must be fought at every turn.

Berlet was one of the first to sound the alarm about these movements and his output — hundreds of reports, articles, presentations and books, including *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* with Matthew N. Lyons and the edited volumes *Eyes Right! Challenging the Right-Wing Backlash* and *Trumping Democracy: From Reagan to the Alt-Right*, have made him a go-to source about any-and-all things conservative.

Exposing the Right and Fighting for Democracy offers an inspiring overview of Berlet's prodigious career. At the same time, contributors to the book don't shy away from reflecting more personally, offering keen descriptions of his gourmet cooking skill, generosity, sense of humor and generally upbeat personality.

A self-described Christian — and a Marxist — Chip Berlet has earned the right to rest on his laurels. Yet that seems unlikely. Even in the face of many retirement well-wishes, it's hard to imagine him sitting back and watching as events unfold.



BERLET SOUGHT TO UNDERSTAND, RATHER THAN LAMPOON, RIGHTWING MOVEMENTS WHOSE VALUES ARE ANATHEMA TO PROGRESSIVES.

Satan who is working to lure the unsuspecting into sin and debauchery. Most secular people, like mainstream Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews, have been blindsided by this proliferating worldview. To wit: We are now seeing "QAnon-ish conspiracies about Joseph Biden

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Continued from page 12

a sense of compatibility despite differences in the music we like or the religion we practice. We need to find those persons in our family tree, or those who simply share our ethnic or national identity, whom we can genuinely honor.

4) Don't assume that guilt and shame have no positive role to play. This has been a dysfunctional assumption on the left, though it is often a reaction to dysfunctional practices. White guilt and shame can turn the focus onto white people's feelings rather than toward racial justice. Yet these emotions a) are inevitable, b) are indicative of

a functioning moral conscience and c) can, at least some of the time, motivate changed behavior. Do I want my grandchildren to go through this reckoning again because I didn't have the courage to? No. Do I feel shame if I find a relative who played a bad role? Of course. Feelings are not irrelevant to political change, but quite central. We need to stop ridiculing the "psychological anguish" white parents express, and make spaces to express and explore these feelings without quick pedantic responses.

5) Go on the offense with a substantive counternarrative. This is the most important point. By denying that CRT is being taught, we lose the ability to offer a different spin on the lessons of our national history. The way forward is not through social engineering by

upper-class white liberals, but by real grass-roots participation. There is a lot to build on, in the public-school system, the union movement, traditions of religious pluralism, community organizations (particularly around schools) and small-d democratic practices. We need to connect the dots between race and class without minimizing either one, as Ian Haney-Lopez argues in his recent book, *Merge Left*. Neither color-blind class politics nor antiracist agendas that downplay class will shift the country's politics. The far right is endangering the future of the country; but as the Peruvian theorist Jose Carlos Mariategui argued in the 1920s, a rising fascism is the fruit of the failures of the left.

This is an important fight. Even if the bans are defeated, teachers will second-

guess their curricular choices for fear of controversy. Graduate students I have worked with are already reconsidering their pursuit of research areas that may generate death threats and cost them jobs. Some people oppose bans because they oppose outright censorship, yet still dislike the teaching of CRT, and such sentiments will no doubt continue to spread the movement against it.

We need to get this right.

Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at Hunter College. She is the author of *The Future of Whiteness* (Polity, 2015).

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Hi Billy,

I remember when you used to focus your ministry more on crusading against chain stores like Starbucks that suck the life out of the communities they plant themselves in. I feel you. So imagine my surprise at the news of Starbucks stores across the country starting to unionize. Who would have imagined these centers of empty capitalist consumption would become hubs of radical activism? These mostly younger workers insist collective action is the solution to their collective problems. The kids are alright as far as I'm concerned.

ROBERT
Jackson Heights

Well, Robert, your enthusiasm is important, and yet, here: The struggle to organize the retail behemoth with their bland monoculture and mean-ass treatment of baristas goes back almost 20 years. And these aren't just kids, Robert — there are mothers and fathers steaming the milk at Starbucks. The National Labor Relations Board must have big files on the company for firing organizers, which is illegal. The union push back then was the century-old anti-authoritarian International Workers of the World (the IWW, or, affectionately, the Wobblies). Among the baristas harassed at work with changing hours and lurking yuppie goons were Daniel Gross, Suley Ayala (an Ecuadorian mother of four) and Sarah Bender — there were scores of sheroes and heroes from here to New Zealand facing down the proto-Bezos billionaire Howard Schultz.

This gentrification mogul — you have to admire in-broad-daylight theft — ripped off the history-making excitement of coffee culture. So many uprisings, including the founding of our "USA," the cultural revolution of Cabaret Voltaire and the surrealists in

Zurich and Paris, and so many anti-colonial uprisings — in Algeria against the French, in Egypt against the United Kingdom and in Greece against the Ottomans — created a prestigious revolutionary flavor. Now, and this is not ironic, here comes the resurrection of that revolutionary fervor in Buffalo and many animated coffee meetings around the world — against the de-

politicized virtual reality coffee house — the neoliberal empire of Starbucks. In fact, the real-estate takeover by Starbucks is right-wing politics at its purest, with neighborhood diners upended by Wall Street-financed monoculture.

The Church of Stop Shopping supported the IWW efforts in 2005 and 2006 with in-store concerts and staged theatrical pieces by actors in the choir. We're pulling for you folks in Buffalo and everywhere! Call us if you need a good radical choir to celebrate your bold move! You can sleep on our couches!

(We are banned from Starbucks so we might have to sing from the sidewalk...)

So, Robert, these are not kids, and this didn't just happen. Even in 2005, Daniel Gross wasn't claiming that he was the liberator of the Starbucks baristas. As he tried to get his job back, he listened patiently to the confessions of workers then working for \$8 an hour, unable to pay for the subway fare, punished with reduced hours for tending to a death in the family. I remember Daniel talking about struggles by farmers against bank foreclosures in the 30's, the Red Scare in the 50's, IWW co-founder Emma Goldman's children's march in 1903 and Paul Robeson lifting his great voice with the songs of Joe Hill ... We sip our cappuccinos on the shoulders of giants!

— R

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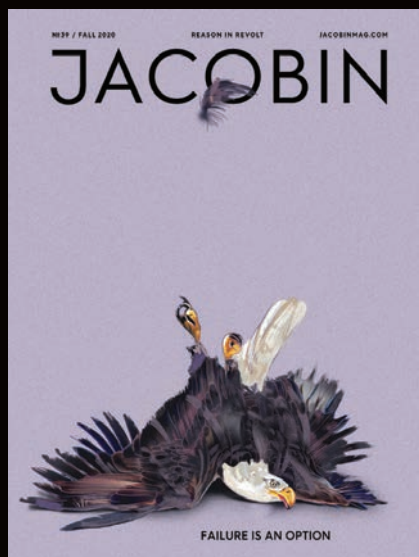
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